

Counting Religion in Britain

A Monthly Round-Up of New Statistical Sources

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OPINION POLLS—CORONATION OF KING CHARLES III

The coronation of His Majesty King Charles III at Westminster Abbey on 6 May 2023 was one of the most significant religious services in Britain during recent years, prompting a flurry of public opinion polling both about the coronation itself, and surrounding events over the same weekend, and into attitudes towards the monarchy as an institution and individual members of the royal family. Here we highlight the major findings about the coronation service itself. All surveys were undertaken online.

Before the coronation: Savanta ComRes polls

In a survey of 2,093 UK adults for CNN on 24–26 March 2023, half the population expressed interest in the coronation (20% very interested and 30% somewhat interested), while 48% were not interested (23% not too interested and 25% not at all interested). Somewhat fewer, 40%, said they expected to watch the coronation ceremony, with 35% not planning to do so nor to participate in any other coronation-related event during the course of the celebratory weekend. Full data tables are available at:

- <https://savanta.com/knowledge-centre/published-polls/coronation-poll-cnn-5-may-2023/>

A subsequent study, for Yahoo News among 2,274 UK adults on 28–30 April 2023, found 41% of the people excited about the coronation (15% very excited and 26% somewhat excited), with 56% not excited (26% not excited much and 30% not at all excited). Notwithstanding, 52% indicated they would watch the coronation, against only 35% thinking they would not watch. Full data tables are available at:

- <https://savanta.com/knowledge-centre/published-polls/royals-poll-yahoo-news-3-may-2023/>

Before the coronation: YouGov polls

For earlier YouGov polling on the topic, please see *Counting Religion in Britain*, No. 91, April 2023, p. 1.

In a poll for *The Times* on 26–27 April 2023, 48% of 2,111 Britons said they were likely to watch the coronation on television (23% fairly likely and 25% very likely), with 46% unlikely (28% very unlikely and 18% fairly unlikely). A clear majority (59%) felt that representatives of other faiths besides Christianity should be involved in the coronation, 16% thinking they should not be involved and 25% being undecided. Full data tables are available at:

- https://docs.cdn.yougov.com/n4dvrwrai/TheTimes_RoyalFamily_230427.pdf

On 4 May 2023, two days before the actual coronation, just over a third of 2,605 adults said they cared about it (11% a great deal and 24% a fair amount), with three-fifths unconcerned (31% caring not very much and another 31% not at all). Full data tables are available at:

- <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/survey-results/daily/2023/05/04/60f27/2>

The following day, 5 May 2023, asked what they were most looking forward to about the imminent coronation weekend, just 25% selected the coronation and celebrations surrounding it, fewer than the 37% who were rejoicing at the prospect of the bank holiday day off, with 34% replying neither. Full data tables are available at:

- <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/survey-results/daily/2023/05/05/ba1bd/1>

In the same poll, merely 17% anticipated attending some form of coronation celebration during the weekend, 72% being clear they would not. Full data tables are available at:

- <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/survey-results/daily/2023/05/05/ba1bd/2>

Before the coronation: other surveys

Ipsos MORI undertook a poll of 2,000 British adults aged 18–75 on 12–13 April 2023, enquiring which of thirteen potential activities respondents would be likely to do to celebrate the King’s coronation. The most frequently chosen, by 40%, was ‘watch celebratory events on television (e.g. the coronation concert)’; there was no mention of the coronation service in this or any other question! The second commonest reason, at 16%, was ‘have a BBQ/dinner party’, with 29% indicating they had no plans to celebrate the coronation. Topline and disaggregated responses are available by following the links in the blog at:

- <https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/coronation-polling-2023>

In a topical poll for the *Daily Mirror* among 1,576 Britons on 24–26 April 2023, Deltapoll asked its respondents whether they were planning to watch the coronation on television. A plurality (46%) said they were, while 39% were not and 15% were undecided. Full data tables are available at:

- <https://deltapoll.co.uk/polls/coronation-mirror>

In a study for the *i* newspaper, undertaken by BMG Research on 3–4 May 2023 among a sample of 1,534 British adults aged 18 and over, 66% of interviewees claimed to be planning to watch the coronation, sub-divided as follows: yes, all of it, 19%; yes, most or some of it, 30%; yes, some of it on the news or social media, 17%. The remaining third comprised 27% intending to watch none of the coronation and 7% unsure. The majority replying they intended to watch the coronation were then asked to select reasons explaining why they would do so. The most frequently cited reasons were ‘it’s a historical event’ (68%), ‘it’s a patriotic event’ (43%), and ‘I’m curious to see the event’ (42%). A sad 8% admitted ‘I’ve got nothing else to do’! Full data tables are available via the blog at:

- <https://www.bmgresearch.co.uk/the-nhs-beats-the-royal-family-as-top-british-symbol/>

After the coronation

On 9 May 2023, asked ‘how much of the coronation did you watch live this weekend?’, 13% of a YouGov sample of 2,875 adults interviewed on 9 May 2023 claimed to have watched all of it live, 16% most of it live, and 25% some of it live. A further 11% said they had watched none of it live but had seen at least some of it afterwards. In all, therefore, 65% watched at least some of the coronation, while 31% saw none of the coronation coverage at all. Full data tables are available at:

- <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/survey-results/daily/2023/05/09/162ef/2>

In the same poll, 18% reported attendance at a coronation celebration of some kind during the weekend, but 79% did not. Full data tables are available at:

- <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/survey-results/daily/2023/05/09/162ef/3>

A survey by Opinium Research on behalf of *The Observer* on 10–12 May 2023, for which 2,050 UK adults were interviewed, reported similar findings to YouGov’s, 64% claiming to have watched the coronation, 27% viewing the whole service and 37% part of it, with 36% not watching at all. When asked whether they had pledged allegiance to King Charles III during the coronation, a somewhat controversial part of the liturgy for the service, just 12% admitted they had done so, with a further 31% claiming they ‘would not have minded’, even though in practice they had not pledged their allegiance to the monarch. Full data tables are available at:

- <https://www.opinium.com/polling-tables-archive/>

Reality was somewhat different than claims made to pollsters. Preliminary data from the Broadcasters’ Audience Research Board (BARB) suggested that the coronation service at

Westminster Abbey had been watched by an average of 18.8 million people across eleven television channels and platforms. Viewing peaked at 20.4 million as the King was crowned just after midday (half way through the two-hour long service), including 13.4 million on BBC One. The audience figures were smaller than the average of 26.5 million individuals who watched the funeral of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in 2022, and the 31 million who saw the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales on the BBC and ITV in 1997 (which is the largest UK television audience on record). BARB's statistics are summarized in a BBC news release at:

- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-65518360>

OPINION POLLS—OTHER TOPICS

Ipsos Global Advisor multinational religion study

Ipsos has published a report on a multinational online poll of religious beliefs and practices and perspectives on religion, undertaken on its Global Advisor platform between 20 January and 3 February 2023 in twenty-six countries, including Great Britain (where around 1,000 adults aged 16–74 were interviewed). The report presents topline data for all nations, as well as 26-country averages (which are subject to various caveats), but here the focus will be on our own national data. In Britain, 48% professed some religion and the same proportion identified as nones. Notwithstanding, 66% agreed that religion does more harm than good in the world, the third highest proportion of all the nations in the survey, while only 27% said that religion defined them as a person, the fourth lowest figure. More than two-fifths (43%) of Britons said they believed in God or a higher power; among this sub-group, 65% agreed that such belief allowed them to overcome crises, 69% that it gave meaning to their lives, and 64% that it made them happier than average. Among the entire sample, 35% believed in supernatural spirits, 34% in heaven, 26% in hell, and 24% in the Devil. Religious practice was at a relatively low level, with 18% claiming to attend a place of worship once a month or more, and 25% praying in private with the same frequency. Two-fifths (41%) judged that religious practices were an important factor in the moral life of the country. The report is available at:

- <https://www.ipsos.com/en/two-global-religious-divides-geographic-and-generational>

World Values Survey, Wave 7 (2017–22): update—new report on UK findings

In the March 2023 edition (No. 90) of *Counting Religion in Britain*, p. 6, we noted the release of the World Values Survey, Wave 7 datasets (including those for Great Britain and Northern Ireland) and itemized the religion-related questions which had been asked. The Policy Institute at King's College London, which oversaw the fieldwork for the UK research in March–September 2022 (when 3,056 adults were interviewed), has now published a 38-page report on the religion-related results for the UK, incorporating comparisons with twenty-three other countries participating in either the World Values Survey, Wave 7 or the European Values Survey, Wave 5, and with trend data given for Britain (rather than the UK). Findings are presented as a series of charts and images, one per page, with an accompanying comment. The overall impression left with the reader is that, across a basket of performance indicators, Britain is less religious than its comparators, and that decline is ongoing, with a few exceptions and contradictions. The report, *Belief, Faith, and Religion: Shifting Attitudes in the UK*, is available to download at:

- <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/policy-institute/assets/lost-faith-the-uk's-changing-attitudes-to-religion.pdf>

The Archbishop of Canterbury and contemporary politics

Historically, the Church of England has often been regarded as ‘the Tory party at prayer’. In modern times, Conservative administrations have sometimes found themselves at loggerheads with the Archbishop of Canterbury and other top leaders of the Church, most famously, of course, during Margaret Thatcher’s years as prime minister. Currently, the flashpoint is over Anglican opposition to the Conservative Government’s Illegal Migration Bill, now making its way through Parliament, with Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, making a highly critical speech in the House of Lords. This situation provided a backdrop to an online poll by YouGov among 5,320 adult Britons on 11 May 2023, although the question was fairly generic: ‘Do you think it is appropriate or inappropriate for the Archbishop of Canterbury to publicly express their views on political matters?’ A plurality of respondents, 44%, considered it was inappropriate, including 67% of Conservative voters and 61% of over-65s. One-third, 32%, deemed it appropriate, among them half of Labour and Liberal Democrat voters, while 23% were undecided, notably with the under-25s (42%). Full data tables are available at:

- <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/survey-results/daily/2023/05/11/e057e/1>

Functions of the British monarchy: is preservation of Christian morality one of them?

An online sample of 2,143 British adults aged 18–75 on 21–24 April 2023 was asked by Ipsos to rate the importance of eight functions of the British royal family. One of the options was ‘to preserve a Christian morality in Britain’, which 44% judged to be important (3% less than in September 2022) and 45% as not important. This made it the sixth most important of the eight functions, the list being headed by ‘to represent the UK at home and abroad’ (73%). The charts for this survey also included one drawn from an earlier online poll, undertaken on 31 March and 1 April 2023, in which the sub-sample of respondents in favour of Britain retaining a monarchy was asked to explain why they thought this way (selecting from a list of sixteen possible reasons). Ranked in fourteenth place was ‘it’s important to preserve religion in Britain’, chosen by a mere 6%. Topline data are available in the report at:

- <https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/two-five-britons-think-monarchy-should-be-modernised>

Demographics of self-reported attendance at religious services in Great Britain

To coincide with the coronation of King Charles III, Lord Ashcroft Polls undertook a multinational survey of attitudes to the institution of the monarchy and the royal family, in Britain, Northern Ireland, and the fourteen other countries in which the King remains Head of State. In Britain, 10,294 adults aged 18 and over were interviewed online between 6 February and 23 March 2023, an unusually large sample which supports an especially rich demographic breakdown of the findings. A large number of questions was asked, the answers to all of them being analysed by, among many other variables, self-reported frequency of attendance at religious services, collapsed into two broad categories (‘never’ and ‘at all’). This is a question that has been historically proven (when cross-checked against actual counts of attendance at religious services) to elicit ‘aspirational’ (aka exaggerated) claims. Even so, it is interesting to note that Britain is now a society in which 70% of people freely acknowledge that they never frequent public worship, while only 30% attend sometimes. The table overleaf illustrates some of the key demographic splits, including by voting in a hypothetical referendum on the future of the monarchy. Most striking was the disproportionately lower figures for non-attendance reported among Londoners, the top (AB) social grade, and ethnic minorities. There was also a larger proportion of worshippers among monarchists than republicans. Much more information can be extracted from the dataset available at:

- <https://lordashcrofthpolls.com/2023/05/uncharted-realms-the-future-of-the-monarchy-in-the-uk-and-around-the-world/>

Self-reported attendance at religious services, Great Britain, 2023

% across	More than once a week	Once a week	A few times a month	A few times a year	Never
Total	3	5	4	19	70
Monarchist	3	6	3	22	66
Republican	2	4	4	14	75
Conservative	2	5	3	23	68
Labour	3	6	3	17	71
Liberal Democrat	4	7	4	20	65
Scottish Nationalist	1	5	1	14	80
Male	3	6	4	16	71
Female	2	5	3	21	69
18–34	3	7	6	16	67
35–54	3	4	3	18	72
55+	2	5	2	21	70
England	3	5	4	19	69
Wales	2	4	3	16	75
Scotland	2	5	2	15	76
London	7	11	6	23	53
AB	4	7	5	22	62
C1	2	5	4	17	72
C2	2	4	3	18	73
DE	2	4	3	16	75
White	2	4	3	18	72
Mixed race	2	9	8	24	57
Black	15	26	7	23	29
Other ethnicities	3	16	16	11	53

Source: Lord Ashcroft Polls

Anti-Semitism in Western and Eastern Europe: The ADL Global 100 Index, 2022

The New York-based Anti-Defamation League has updated its Global 100 index of anti-Semitism (initiated in 2014) with a new report and data from a survey of attitudes towards Jews in ten European countries (including the UK, where 500 people were interviewed), undertaken by telephone between 8 November and 5 December 2022. The index of anti-Semitism is constructed from a core set of questions measuring acceptance of negative Jewish stereotypes, respondents saying that at least six of the statements are ‘probably true# being deemed to harbour extensive anti-Semitic attitudes. In the UK in 2022, the anti-Semitism index was 10%, the lowest of all the nations surveyed apart from The Netherlands (on 6%, with Hungary at the other extreme, on 37%). The aggregate UK figure was broadly similar to the level found in previous ADL studies (in 2014, 2015, 2017, and 2019); however, it varied by demographics, being greater among men than women, under-35s than over-50s, and Christians than religious nones. Notwithstanding the relatively low index score, on one of the statements (‘Jews are more loyal to Israel than to this country’), agreement in the UK reached 34%, much the same as in 2017 and 2019, albeit down on the 41% logged in 2015, while 20% in the UK endorsed the trope that ‘Jews still talk too much about what happened to them in the Holocaust’. Knowledge of the Holocaust was high in the UK (94%), but 6% either denied or minimized the scale of the Holocaust. The report is available at:

- https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/2023-05/ADL-Global100-2023_1.pdf

FAITH ORGANIZATION STUDIES

Church Commissioners for England annual report, 2022

Supporting the Church of England now and for the Long Term: The Church Commissioners for England Annual Report, 2022 incorporates the customary financial statements for the year preceded by commentary and overview of investment strategy and governance arrangements. The value of the Commissioners' investment fund was £10.3 billion (compared with £10.1 billion in 2021), with the return on investment at 5.0%, which was half the thirty-year average, reflecting the challenging economic situation in 2022. Total charitable expenditure (excluding the clergy pensions obligation) amounted to £186.8 million (26.8% more than in 2021), the majority of which supported dioceses and the local church. The report is available at:

- <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/leadership-and-governance/church-commissioners-england/how-we-are-governed/publications>

Church of Scotland membership and attendance statistics for 2022

Among the reports received by the Church of Scotland General Assembly, which gathered in hybrid form from 20 to 25 May 2023, were the Church's congregational statistics as at 31 December 2022, based on an 89% response rate. Membership (communicants) then stood at 270,300, a fall of 4.7% from 2021, in 1,247 congregations; membership gains (by profession of faith, certificate, or restoration) at 2,825 during the previous year were greatly surpassed by 'removals' (by death, certificate, or otherwise) of 16,145. Additionally, there were 10,940 individuals involved in the life of congregations whose names were not on the communion roll. Funerals were the most numerous of the occasional offices, representing 22.6% of persons who died in Scotland during 2022. Participation in public worship continued to be affected by the long shadow of Covid-19, with attendance in a 'regular' week enumerated at 64,850 in person (equivalent to just 24.0% of membership), with the majority aged 65 and over; 28,865 online; and 5,075 offline. More information is available in the General Assembly's 'order of proceedings' at:

- https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/108348/order-of-proceedings-2023.pdf

OFFICIAL AND QUASI-OFFICIAL STATISTICS

Marriages in England and Wales, 2020

The Office for National Statistics has published a statistical bulletin and data on *Marriages in England and Wales, 2020*. This was an unusual year in that, for large parts of it, wedding venues (including places of worship) were closed on account of Covid-19 lockdowns, and, even when reopened, they were subject to restrictions on the numbers of people who could attend weddings. Unsurprisingly, the total of marriages in 2020 was, at 85,770, 61.0% lower than in 2019 and the fewest on record since 1838; it remains to be seen whether there will be any bounce-back reported for 2021. The proportion of opposite-sex weddings solemnized according to religious rites was just 15.0%, down from 18.7% in 2019 and the lowest percentage on record; the proportion has been falling significantly in recent decades, and it seems improbable that there will be any recovery, especially if humanist ceremonies are legalized in England and Wales in due course (they are already lawful in Scotland). About two-thirds of religious ceremonies took place in the Church of England or Church in Wales. Full details are available at:

- <https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/marriagesinenglandandwales2020>

Census, 2021, England and Wales: new reports and data

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) is continuing to publish new reports and data from the 2021 population census of England and Wales. One of the latest outputs is *Protected Characteristics by Disability Status, England and Wales: Census, 2021*, section 4 of which concerns religion. Across most age bands, the highest prevalence of disability was for those reporting ‘other religion’, except for the over-65s among whom Muslims had the highest prevalence of disability. Full details are available at:

- <https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/protectedcharacteristicsbydisabilitystatusenglandandwalescensus2021>

Another recent ONS report is *Household Characteristics by Tenure, England and Wales: Census, 2021*, section 8 of which considers tenure by religion. Muslim households were found to have the highest levels of rented accommodation, while Sikh households were most likely to own their accommodation. Full details are available at:

- <https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/householdcharacteristicsbytenurebysubnationalgeographiesenglandandwales2021>

Meanwhile, the June 2023 issue (No. 87) of *FutureFirst*, the free bimonthly e-newsletter of Brierley Consultancy, includes three articles based on the results of the 2021 religious census of England and Wales, on: ethnicity and religion (pp. 1–2); age and religion (p. 5); and living arrangements and religion (p. 6). Additionally, two attachments provide detailed statistical tables in support of the first two of these articles. Copies are available from:

- peter@brierleyres.com

NEW DATASETS

European Social Survey Round 10 data release

The third edition of data and documentation for the European Social Survey (ESS) Round 10 (2020–22) was published on 11 May 2023, including the first release of data for the UK, where 1,149 mostly face-to-face interviews were conducted by the National Centre for Social Research between 15 August 2021 and 2 September 2022, with funding from the Economic and Social Research Council. This is a much smaller sample than in previous rounds, reflecting Covid-19 conditions. The standard ESS religion-related questions were asked, as follows: belonging to a religion, self-assessed religiosity, frequency of attendance at religious services apart from rites of passage, frequency of prayer outside religious services, and experience of discrimination on religious grounds. For further information and data access, go to:

- <https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org>

UK Data Service, SN 9079: Community Life Survey, 2021–2022

The Community Life Survey (CLS) is conducted annually by Kantar Public on behalf of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport. In the latest round, undertaken between 11 October 2021 and 30 September 2022, 10,126 adults aged 16 and over living in private residences in England were interviewed online (in 8,343 cases) or by self-completion postal questionnaire (1,783). One aim of the CLS is to investigate religion in relation to community life, including volunteering and charitable giving. Questions are also asked about religious affiliation and whether respondents actively practised their faith and mixed socially with different religious groups. Further information about the dataset can be found in the catalogue description at:

- <https://beta.ukdataservice.ac.uk/datacatalogue/studies/study?id=9079>

APPENDIX
KEYWORDS/TAGS

Anti-Defamation League, anti-Semitism, Archbishop of Canterbury, attendance at religious services, BMG Research, Broadcasters' Audience Research Board, census of population, charitable giving, Christian morality, Church Commissioners, church membership, Church of England, Church of Scotland, CNN, Community Life Survey, Coronation, coronavirus, Covid-19, Daily Mirror, Department for Digital Culture Media and Sport, devil, disability, European Social Survey, God, heaven, hell, Holocaust, i newspaper, Illegal Migration Bill, Ipsos Global Advisor, Ipsos MORI, Israel, Jews, Justin Welby, Kantar Public, King Charles III, Lord Ashcroft Polls, marriages, monarchy, National Centre for Social Research, Office for National Statistics, Opinium Research, Peter Brierley, Policy Institute King's College London, politics, prayer, religious affiliation, religious beliefs, religious census, religious practices, religious prejudice, rites of passage, royal family, Savanta ComRes, self-assessed religiosity, supernatural spirits, television audience for coronation, tenure, The Observer, The Times, UK Data Service, volunteering, World Values Survey, Yahoo News, YouGov